United Nations S/PV.7761

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7761st meeting

Thursday, 25 August 2016, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Adnin	(Malaysia)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Stehelin
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Méndez Graterol

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/706)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-26917 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/706)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, and Mr. Joakim Vaverka, representative of the Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/706, which contains the thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zarif.

Mr. Zarif: On 1 July, Liberia crossed a historic milestone and assumed full responsibility for its security. I applaud the Government and the people of Liberia for the successful completion of the security transition, in keeping with Security Council expectations. I commend the Liberian institutions and international partners for their leadership and commitment, which made reaching that milestone possible.

It is now up to the Liberians to demonstrate full ownership and responsibility for ensuring that the significant investment made in building the security institutions is not lost, that this achievement serves as a foundation for more a focused and determined continuation of efforts to strengthen their capacity and professionalism, and that the execution of the outstanding activities under the Government's plan for the transition of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) remains on track.

Following the security transition, the overall situation in Liberia has remained calm. UNMIL has been closely monitoring the performance of the security institutions and adjusting its own engagement accordingly. That has also necessitated a review of the nature and form of the future support and cooperation between the Government, on the one hand, and UNMIL and other international partners, on the other, based on the clear leading role of the Liberian actors and continued, recalibrated support from international actors. Accordingly, consultations are ongoing between the Government and the United Nations and other stakeholders on the revised institutional framework for such cooperation.

In the meantime, UNMIL remains engaged with a view to consolidating the gains of the past years and advancing the development of the security and justice structures, frameworks and accountability mechanisms. That includes the training and mentoring of senior management, assistance in the drafting of legislation, policies and standard operating procedures, and support for the decentralization of security services. For example, with the technical training and logistical assistance of UNMIL, the Liberian National Police has opened five professional standards divisions in the counties to deconcentrate security services from Monrovia. UNMIL also provided support in developing draft administrative regulations to implement the Liberian National Police and immigration services acts, once signed into law.

Following the takeover of the security functions, the Government will need to redouble its focus and energy in order to sustain the progress and implement the remaining components of its transition plan. I am afraid, however, that will not be possible without continued international support. Challenges are still complex, and too many for Liberia to successfully tackle them by itself.

Over the recent period, Liberia has without doubt continued to achieve progress in security and peace consolidation. Some key legislation, such as the firearms and ammunition control act, was adopted and was enacted by the President. The Liberian National Police and immigration services acts were also adopted, but their signing into law has been delayed because of some continuing disagreements on a number of clauses. The Government has submitted to the legislature a draft uniform code of military justice. The draft code provides for a legal framework for jurisdictional

authority, dispensing justice and the right to due process within the armed forces of Liberia. I cannot overemphasize the importance of expeditious approval and enactment of those critical laws to sustain progress on the security transition.

Similarly, the domestic violence act, which the House of Representatives adopted in July, is yet to be concurred by the Senate. The current version of the act, regrettably, excludes the provisions that would have criminalized female genital mutilation. The women's legislative caucus continues to lack the majority's support in the legislature to outlaw that practice. In addition, the land authority and land rights acts, which are key elements of the reconciliation process, still remain to be adopted into law. In a positive development, the long-awaited draft of the local Government act, which is a key component of implementing the decentralization programme, reached the legislature in July.

Moreover, the overall political climate in Liberia continues to be impacted by the fallout from the Global Witness report issued in May, which implicated some senior officials in bribery. The allegations triggered strong public reactions and, among other consequences, led to a tense stand-off in the House of Representatives, where the majority of legislators continue to demand the resignation of the Speaker, who was one of the officials implicated in the report. The standoff has led to the boycott of regular House sessions by the opponents of the Speaker, who, in turn, has accused the President of plotting to remove him The standoff has in effect paralysed the normal functioning of the legislature and resulted in a separate parallel session held by the opposing camps in the presence of police on the capital routes. Outside the legislature, supporters have each camp have held demonstrations, which fortunately have not led to any serious security incident.

One the potentially serious consequences of the political infighting within the legislature is the delay in adopting the national budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year, which includes the financing of the National Elections Commission and preparatory activities, including those related to the security for the October 2017 presidential and legislative elections. That should also be viewed against the background of a hardening socioeconomic environment due to the worsening economic outlook, which has prompted the Government to introduce austerity measures, revise downwards the current year's budget and introduce an additional 11 per cent decrease in the proposed budget for the next year.

Also, last week the Government announced the closure of several radio stations — Voice FM, Radio Lib 24 and Shata FM — for failing to comply with tax and licensing regulations. Opposition groups perceived that as a Government attempt to muzzle the independence of the media. One of the opposition parties, the All Liberia Coalition Party, accused the President and the Government of seeking an unfair advantage for the Unity Party — the ruling party — with a view to influencing the 2017 elections by silencing the independent media and seeking the removal of political opponents, in particular the Speaker of the House, for their critical views. UNMIL has actively encouraged the early resolution of those cases through equitable application of the relevant regulations.

The current unsatisfactory situation calls for ian urgent resolution in order to ensure the focus and resources on critical national priorities. That is becoming all the more pressing, as the legislature is expected to move into recess at the end of the month. The majority of House members, meeting in separate session, wrote to the President to request the postponement of the recess by one month.

In Liberia, as anywhere else in the world, the prevention of conflict can be only effective in the context of broader social, political and economic transformations and respect for the rule of law. I therefore remain concerned about the overall lack of progress on addressing the underlying causes of divisions and exclusion in Liberia. The failure to robustly pursue reconciliation, and delays in structural changes, such as land reform and decentralization, raise a red flag about the future prospects for peace and security in the country.

Tendencies towards division and exclusion were manifested again in the constitutional review process, in the form of Proposition No. 24, to render Liberia a Christian nation, and Proposition No. 6 ,to grant Liberian nationality based on race, which have caused considerable tension despite the President's rejection of those propositions, among others. I have been engaged with legislators and religious and traditional community representatives to defuse the tension and to encourage the importance of preserving and building on Liberia's diversity and adherence to international standards and norms.

Over the past months, in my meetings with State officials, I consistently urged constructive dialogue to

overcome disagreements and to refocus on substantive national issues. I also engaged with all political parties, media representatives, religious and traditional leaders and women's groups to discuss political, governance and security issues in the run-up to the 2017 elections. I also stressed the importance of meaningful political discourse, national unity and the need for all political actors to adhere to electoral laws and regulations. I urged the political parties to demonstrate leadership and commitment to peaceful campaigning, robust civic education and promoting equitable women's representation in the political decision-making processes.

All parties I met with expressed a strong desire for the peaceful conduct of the elections and recognized their responsibility in that regard. Their main concerns related to electoral transparency and potential for fraud, the use of Government assets for political party campaigning and the capacity of the Liberia National Police to ensure security. The Government has also taken steps to engage the political parties on the conduct of the elections. Earlier this month, the Minister of Justice invited the leaders of all political parties to discuss their role and responsibility in ensuring peaceful and credible elections. I will continue to encourage stronger engagement between the Government and other political actors to ensure a peaceful environment in Liberia, particularly during the electoral period.

As the successes of the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Liberia is leading to adjustments in our presence, and as the country is preparing for its forthcoming important political transition, many Liberians are expressing concern about the prospects of UNMIL's withdrawal and potential lack of United Nations support during the elections. There is consensus among national actors that the next elections will be a critical test for Liberia's stability, democracy and development. Therefore, both Liberia and the international community must not lose sight of the still arduous path towards sustainable peace in the country and the region, which will require long-term robust engagement by all concerned, particularly by the Security Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Zarif for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Vaverka.

Mr. Vaverka: I thank you, Madam President, for the invitation to brief the Security Council on behalf the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I will present the main focus of the Commission's work over the past couple of months, as well as our upcoming priorities for the fall of 2016.

Let me first take this opportunity to congratulate the Liberian Government on the successful resumption of security responsibilities on 30 June. An important milestone was reached this summer, and I would also like to commend the peacekeeping mission in Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), for its continued support provided during the transition.

In May, the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission launched the revised statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia. It encapsulates the priority actions to be undertaken by the Government and the PBC, respectively, over the next two years. I feel confident that the statement of mutual commitments provides a robust basis for our work in support of peacebuilding efforts during a crucial period of transition for Liberia.

In the statement of mutual commitments, the Commission commits to continuing to provide support in the areas of promoting national reconciliation, security-sector development and strengthening the rule of law. I was pleased to note that the statement of mutual commitments was consistently referred to by Liberian officials during the recent visit to Liberia by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya. It signalled to us a true sense of shared ownership and genuine interest in rolling out the commitments without delay.

In addition to the three areas that I have just mentioned, the PBC will follow up on conversations with national interlocutors regarding good governance, employment-generation, equal treatment of ethnic and religious groups, as well as the need to build trust and confidence between the security sector and citizens. The PBC also came away from the visit with a renewed commitment to forge stronger collaboration with the international financial institutions. Allow me to describe two areas to which the Commission will devote special attention over the coming months.

First of all, we will pay particular attention to preparations for the upcoming presidential and legislative elections in 2017. That will include engaging with national stakeholders, such as the National Elections Commission and the Governance Commission, in supporting efforts by the Government to ensure that the elections are conducted successfully and contribute to further democratic consolidation.

By addressing critical factors early, the PBC will be able, we hope, to support preventive measures, ranging from ensuring that efficient and quick mechanisms for dispute-resolution are in place to supporting regular channels for dialogue between the security forces and the public. In addition, the PBC will emphasize the importance of the participation of women, youth and civil society throughout the electoral process.

Secondly, the Commission will pay close attention to reconciliation. As noted in the report (S/2016/706) of the Secretary-General, there have been delays in advancing national reconciliation. We know that, in order to ensure a prosperous and stable Liberia in the years to come, it will be important to continue strengthening the social fabric and social cohesion. The Liberian Government has described reconciliation as a multidimensional process of overcoming social, political and religious cleavages, healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war and confronting and addressing historical and structural wrongs. The process cuts to the core of addressing the root causes of the conflict, and we remain committed to helping the Liberian authorities in that pursuit.

Later this fall, important decisions will be taken by the Security Council regarding the future United Nations presence in Liberia. In preparation for those deliberations, and in fulfilment of our advisory mandate, the Peacebuilding Commission looks forward to providing succinct and targeted advice on the longer-term peacebuilding needs and priorities. The Chair of the Liberia configuration will be travelling to Liberia early this fall to consult with the Government, national stakeholders and international actors.

In the statement of mutual commitments, the PBC committed to convening a dedicated multi-stakeholder forum on Liberia to discuss peacebuilding priorities for that purpose. It is our hope that such advice will complement the input received by the Council from other United Nations system entities, and in the end contribute to helping the United Nations and the international community in planning strategically and comprehensively for a smooth and successful transition.

In conclusion, let me reiterate what we have stated before. There is no excuse for either the United Nations system or the international community to provide peacebuilding support based on a fragmented approach. As UNMIL continues to draw down, we have a responsibility to sustain international attention on Liberia during and beyond the transition period, in terms of mobilizing both financial support and political accompaniment. The resolutions on peacebuilding adopted this spring provide clear guidance and strong impetus in that regard. The PBC looks forward to continuing its close collaboration with the Security Council in supporting Liberia on its path towards further consolidation of peace over the coming years.

The President: I thank Mr. Vaverka for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): On behalf of my grateful President and my nation, permit me to thank the Security Council for its support for Liberia's ongoing transformation. The assistance in the maintenance of peace and security provided by the Council through the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been pivotal to Liberia's stability and progress, as well as to the security and stability of the West Africa subregion. We urge the Council to continue its close attention and support for Liberia as we strive to consolidate our cherished peace.

On 1 July, the Liberian Government was proud to formally resume full security responsibilities for our country. Scarred by a protracted war and seared by a long history of mistrust, it can be understood why some Liberians have not been as enthusiastic and optimistic as others about the security transition. However, together we will continue to work for a future of peace, security and shared prosperity, which we know will ultimately rest in our own hands.

We thank Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing and for his continued commitment and engagement throughout this period. Similarly, we thank the representative of the Peacebuilding Commission for the briefing delivered on behalf of the Commission. The Liberian Government appreciates the continued engagement of the Commission, remains committed to the statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia and urges international support for its successful implementation.

The Liberian Government also wishes to reassure the Council and the broader international community of its renewed commitment to taking every measure necessary to safeguard its peace, security and stability. We are keenly aware of the invaluable linkages that we share in that regard with our subregion, and

will therefore continue to act to ensure the security and stability of our neighbours. We embrace those responsibilities with unrelenting dedication.

That is why, although the forecasted growth in our economy has been largely weakened by the devastation resulting from Ebola and the precipitous decline in the prices of our main exports, we have continued to prioritize and provide, within the limits of our means, support to the relevant security institutions, challenging them to work together with the various communities in ensuring the continuing peace and security of the country.

To that end, the Liberia National Police and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization have continued, among other security measures, to recruit, train and deploy in many parts of the country. The judicial system is being reformed so as to improve access and public confidence and is also being extended to other parts of the country.

As we move ahead on rebuilding our nation — grateful, as always, for the support of our partners — we know that the resolve of the Government and the resilience of the Liberian people are indispensable to our ability to continue along our chosen path of consolidating peace. The Government has continued to demonstrate its political will, and the Liberian people continue to be highly motivated in that regard.

However, the current economic downturn has had the effect of undermining our ability to fully implement some of the programmes that could further advance our efforts towards achieving those objectives. They include accelerating the pace of the security-sector reforms as well as advancing programmes of reconciliation, decentralization, youth employment and local Government reforms. In response to the dire economic constraints, we have continued to adopt a number of austerity measures, while intensifying our fight against corruption so as to curb waste and abuse, ensure transparency and accountability and identify and reallocate our meagre resources so that we can continue the reforms and implement the needed programmes.

In October 2017, Liberia will conduct legislative and presidential elections. A successful election — one that is seen to be free, fair and credible by Liberians and by the international community — will be critical to consolidating Liberia's peace and its democratic transformation. The Liberian Government understands the significance of those elections and is determined to deliver a process and an outcome that are inclusive, participatory, credible, free and fair. We also urge the Council to support those critical undertakings.

Currently, there are 23 registered political parties, each of which is a member of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee, a growing forum of political parties committed to working with the National Elections Commission and other relevant stakeholders to continuously explore avenues of cooperation and problem-solving in furtherance of maintaining a conducive and peaceful atmosphere before, during and after the elections.

Meanwhile, a speedy resolution can be expected to the ongoing impasse in the Lower House of the legislature, largely brought about by the indictment of the Speaker of the House on charges of corruption, so that much-needed legislative focus and attention can be returned to the passage of a number of crucially enabling pieces of legislation affecting the elections and our overall peace consolidation efforts. Two of them include the possibility of a referendum on proposed changes to the Constitution, as well as a redefinition of land ownership and its associated rights, which will ensure, for the first time for indigenous families and communities, their right to the lands on which they have always lived — a right that extends beyond those of squatters.

Today, growing pains notwithstanding, Liberia is safe and stable. The country is progressively changing. From a past of war, we are working for peace; from fear, we are experiencing freedom; and from hopelessness, we are becoming hopeful. Difficult as it often is, we are finding the strength to come to terms with, and are committed to working to avoid, the tragedies of our dark past. We are determined to embrace the promise of a brighter future of togetherness.

Let there be no doubt: we are grappling with numerous anxieties and complexities, so that we can deepen a culture of democratic governance and change. That is made even more challenging by strains on available human and institutional capacities. Yet we are hopeful, increasingly and reassuringly at peace with ourselves and with our neighbours, unwavering in our determination and blessed with a resilient spirit to rise even when we were predicted to fall.

In obvious recognition of Liberia's rising, for the first time since the establishment of our subregional

organization, the Economic Community of West African States recently honoured the Government and the people of Liberia with the current chairmanship of its Authority of Heads of States and Governments. The Mano River Union has also conferred its current chairmanship upon our nation. We do not take those responsibilities lightly.

And yes, we stand in need of the Council's understanding and support, as well as the understanding and support of our international partners, especially as we strive to recreate our society into one that is freer, more just, more equitable, more tolerant, more accountable and more democratic — an emerging society that respects differences in gender, religion, tribe and political association, and yet provides opportunities to all without discrimination. We have, no doubt, a long road to travel. But, as a people, we are determined to get there.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.